

NATIONAL DEFENSE IN THE AMERICAN WAY

by
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Radio address by Miss Harriet Elliott, in charge of the Consumer Protection Division of the National Defense Advisory Commission, delivered over Station WBIG, Greensboro, North Carolina, November 3, 1940, 6:30 p.m., E.S.T.

Before I left Greensboro last May to take up my new responsibilities as the member of the National Defense Advisory Commission in charge of Consumer Protection, dozens of my neighbors came to wish me well. Some of them offered assistance; a few of them gave me advice and others asked questions.

In Washington I found that scores of national organizations, and hundreds of individuals from all parts of the country were making the same offers of assistance and asking the same questions:

"What can we do?"

"How can we give?"

"Where can we serve?"

Pledges of active cooperation have come from manufacturers, labor unions, farmers, civic organizations, Negro groups, social workers and consumer associations, to name but a few. This widespread desire on the part of individuals and organizations for an active role in the national defense program is an eloquent tribute to our democratic way of life. It indicates that in the United States service to our country is a desired privilege and not a compulsion.

Today, we are at work on the biggest job we have ever undertaken. On three continents nations are involved in total war. Here in

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America we are preparing our democracy for total defense. In this program the National Defense Advisory Commission is serving as the nation's quartermaster, whose responsibility it is to see that the Army, Navy and the people of the United States get everything they need for defense.

It is not necessary for me to go into detail at this time to explain to you the important requirements of our military and naval forces. You know we need trained men, tanks, guns, battleships, and planes. You know we need uniforms, shoes, food, medical supplies, gasoline and other equipment. We need these materials delivered at the proper time and to the proper place.

In juxtaposition with these military requirements are the needs of our civilian population. The men, women and children in the homes of America must be assured of a steady flow of clothing, food and other consumer commodities. They must be protected against unnecessary price increases or quality deterioration. Their needs must be met without jeopardizing the defense program.

Adequate housing must be available for those who find themselves working in the expanding defense industries. Families which have moved from one locality to another because of employment in defense activities, must be given necessary community services. Adequate school and recreation facilities must be provided for their children. To meet these military and civilian needs, there must be extensive coordination of our national resources, production facilities, plant capacity and human skills.

My responsibility on the Defense Commission is to make recommendations which balance military and civilian needs, encourage the free

flow of consumer goods, guard against unwarranted price increases, and to cooperate with existing governmental and private agencies in maintaining and encouraging activities designed to promote a healthy and effective population.

The Division of Consumer Protection is seeking to achieve these goals without super-imposing a master plan or a complex administrative machinery on the American people. We work in close cooperation with other offices of the Defense Commission and we are in daily consultation with many government agencies. With their assistance we keep a close check on price changes and the supply of consumer goods.

Our program is proceeding along three main lines. We have a technical section concerned with consumer goods and markets which collects information on prices, watches inventories and analyzes the impact of the defense program on the public's buying power. Our health and welfare section deals with the problems of social well-being. Federal agencies concerned with social security, nutrition, health and child welfare coordinate their work with ours. We also cooperate through our civic contacts section with public and private agencies in these fields operating in the States and local communities. We work in close cooperation with the Commission's Coordinator of Defense Purchases and the Coordinator of Housing.

Much of our "consumer protection" work is a behind-the-scenes job, such as anticipating market dislocations before they occur. All our activities are an integral part of the work of the entire Defense Commission. Each member of the Commission in the course of functioning in his particular area of defense activity, supplies information on

matters which relate to consumer interests. On the other hand, we advise on the huge defense purchases, recommending the spacing and timing of orders where we find that through such an order unnecessary hardship may befall the consumer.

I have had occasion to hold two large conferences during the past few months. One with national civic organizations and the other with national retail associations. On both occasions I have been impressed by the sincere desire of these groups to cooperate with the work of the Defense Commission. Many of the civic organizations have developed special consumer education programs; others have focused their attention on expanded community services; some have initiated discussion groups and forums keyed to present-day developments. We cooperate with all these organizations by suggesting ways and means by which they can serve their memberships, communities and the defense program. The retail associations which sent representatives to the recent conference held in Washington pledged their wholehearted cooperation to do all they can to prevent unjustified price increases. They passed the following resolution:

"The representatives of retail merchants here assembled announce that it is their intention to devote their efforts to prevent so far as possible any unjustifiable rise in retail prices, by urging upon the general retail trade vigorous opposition to all price increases which appear to be unwarranted and which might cause difficulty to the Government and the consuming public.

"We agree to cooperate wholeheartedly, with the National Defense Advisory Commission in determining the justification of any price rise that might take place; in exchanging information; and in advising with

the National Defense Advisory Commission as to the wisest plan to pursue.

"We announce that, providing the cost to us of the merchandise that we sell does not vary substantially, and providing also, that our cost of doing business does not increase substantially, we will not alter past methods and practices in arriving at our selling prices."

On November 12th, I am meeting with wholesale merchants and distributors to discuss methods of cooperation between their organizations and my office. Thus our program develops--each group and individual cooperating and functioning within the area and work he knows best.

It is significant that in a democracy we want more than military defense. We want total defense. We want to safeguard our American way of life from enemies within as well as enemies without. Hunger, malnutrition, ignorance and misinformation, lack of adequate housing, clothing and warmth--these are the enemies within our gates. These are the saboteurs of democracy which sap men's faith and strength and courage. They breed suspicion and hatred. They make men wonder "What is there to defend? What have I to lose or gain?"

These menaces cannot be eliminated by guns and planes but only by intelligent planning, clear thinking and a deep sense of individual responsibility. We must see to our human defenses as well as to our military defenses. We must make our democracy a functioning blessing to all. Every man, woman and child in the nation must have the opportunity to experience the benefits, freedom and advantages of the American way of life and thus have a personal stake in its protection and maintenance.

Each one of us has a job to do - none more important than the rest - each vital to the united effort to make America strong and impregnable. No job is too small or too insignificant if it contributes to the general welfare of the nation. Let us make ourselves, by word and action, vigorous testimonials to democratic living. Let us look into our own homes and local communities and make them fortresses of strength through good health, welfare and happiness. Let us raise those dangerously low standards of living, eliminate those weaknesses in human relations which undermine national unity.

Remember that the morale, effectiveness and social well-being of your home and your community sets the standard for the morale, effectiveness and social well-being of the nation.

Adult study programs, community meetings, radio forums, and library services can be expanded or started to add to the effectiveness of your individual and community life. Many localities already have programs under way to give their people added proficiency in nutrition, nursing, child-care, special manual skills, and in active citizenship. A little effort and characteristic American cooperation can develop similar activities to every community.

And let us add to these, full public discussion of the issues facing us, through all available channels. In many countries, this essential right of free men has disappeared with the light of freedom and reason.

Here in the United States, we have freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the airwaves. Our government does not tell us what to say, what to read or which radio programs we may listen to. We do

not need government permits for discussion groups or forums or lectures. We are a free people--free to think and talk and listen as we choose. This freedom is an actual instrument for the preservation of our democracy. Let us exercise it in educating ourselves on the human and political affairs of the day. Let us know the world we live in, and thus defeat confusion and misinformation by intelligence and understanding.

Energetic and informed public opinion is a bulwark of democracy. Ignorance is a national liability. In time of emergency this weakness becomes a positive menace. Public interest and participation are first essentials in the democratic process.

Today every channel of public information is striving to keep us informed on important national and international events. The newspapers report and analyze the news of the day, the radio brings us overseas and spot news broadcasts, the newsreels give us eye-witness accounts. They relay to our eyes and ears vivid pictures of world history in the making. We read, look and listen because these are interesting and exciting things. But we must also think about these events and their meaning for our present and future well-being as individuals and as a nation. We must discuss them fully, openly, and calmly in our homes and in our public meeting places, if we are to prepare ourselves to meet their challenge.

It is indeed fitting that I should be saying these things to you over the radio. Broadcasting, as we know it in the United States, has become a fundamental instrument and privilege of democracy. It is a demonstration of democracy in action. For example, I am speaking to you of my own free will, I am expressing my own ideas -- you on the

other hand are listening of your own free will. If you disagree with me or if you have heard enough you can turn the dial to another program or flip a little switch on your radio and I am no longer a guest in your home.

The people of totalitarian nations do not have these privileges. Their radio is government controlled. Their sets are manufactured according to government specifications, and are designed to eliminate all but authorized broadcasts. They cannot get world news by short wave. Their news and information is interpreted for them in accordance with the will of a dictator. Their programs are chosen and planned for them and the people are ordered to listen. Failure to do so is a sign of disloyalty.

In America the radio has performed a valiant service in helping to educate us in the meaning of democracy, and good citizenship. It has been instrumental in making available to millions of our people the world's best music, song, and dramatic entertainment. It has brought into the homes of America information, diversion and amusement.

Besides the dissemination of timely news, the presentation of educational and cultural programs, and the offering of entertainment, radio has a definite responsibility in the present emergency to prepare America for total defense. Radio stations can cooperate with local organizations in the promotion and protection of human welfare in the communities they serve. They can encourage broadcasts by dietitians and food experts who can inform us what protective foods to eat and how to prepare them. They can help us develop physical fitness.

Clear minds function well in strong bodies. We need to know more about body building foods. We should know when they are available and where they are abundant.

Daily market news broadcasts are needed to tell housewives which foods are plentiful and good buys. Experienced market news reporters can readily determine what the retail stores will be offering in abundance by studying the early morning supplies in the local wholesale produce markets. Passing this information on to the people of a community is an important public service which radio stations can perform. It will aid the housewife who has to keep her purchases within a limited budget; it will help the wholesale and retail food merchant in calling public attention to the foods available. I am glad to commend the very station over which I am speaking for giving a curb market-news service to the consumers in this locality.

Every community should seek cooperative action between radio station, market place and consumer to give the public a daily description of the over-all food supplies available, in addition to impartial information on the best food purchases of the day. If this service is tied in with up-to-the-minute suggestions for balanced menus and food preparation, planned and broadcast by trained home economists and food experts, the home line front will have basic knowledge for fortifying our much needed human defenses.

You will find consumer representatives on the State and Local Councils of Defense ready to assist their communities in creating better food-news services. Municipal departments of markets and State and Federal agencies concerned with the problems of food and nutrition will

be glad to supply their facilities and suggestions. I am certain that radio stations throughout the nation will be willing to cooperate in a national program to eliminate malnutrition in America.

Here is an educational, news and defense service combined. We have the knowledge and the medium for its dissemination. We have the people who need this knowledge. Let us get them together and make this service to our human defenses available in every community. Forty-five million radio sets in American homes, cars and public places can be a formidable weapon in combatting malnutrition and undernourishment.

We have seen freedom vanish from many lands in a few short years. We have seen nations unwilling and unable to defend their freedom. Our problem is not the willingness of Americans to defend their democracy. Most of our people are eager to do all they can to protect our way of life. But national defense requires more than willingness and good intentions. It needs a people able to defend themselves. It is the job of each one of us to help make that possible.

In depending on radio, the press, and public discussion to assist us in building our material and human defenses, we are daily demonstrating the truth of Walt Whitman's words:

"The liberties of the people are
safe as long as there are tongues
to speak and ears to hear."

To this let us add -- "And as long as there are hearts and willing hands to help the weak and underprivileged become strong and active in the American way of life."

